

Jon Schueler



Jon Schueler has walked a difficult path between opposites. His paintings look abstract but are not. The character of the Scottish coast, where he lives, speaks through these poetic canvases with remarkable clarity and exactness. One has only to compare them with the Highland skies to understand how true the paintings are to the light, the atmosphere, the dramatic spirit of the place.

And yet these are basically abstract pictures, not unrelated to the work of Mark Rothko or some of Clyfford Still's big canvases. They have that kind of largeness, mystery and power. They strike a more precarious balance between observation and abstract form than do most paintings that try to wed the two—such as those of Milton Avery or Georgia O'Keeffe, to name at random artists who have succeeded in their own way.

Schueler's solution is more difficult because it is less obvious. He risks more by deliberately exploring a narrow area where nothing is secure, where everything is changing, evanescent and evocative. We see his paintings one minute as clouds and sea and islands, the next as swirling arrangements of pure color and light. And they shift back and forth in our vision from one pole to the other, amassing richness from both. It is hardly necessary to add that their impact is unabashedly romantic and poetic.

John I. H. Baur

## The Sky

When I speak of nature, I speak of the sky, because the sky has become all of nature to me. But it is most particularly the brooding, storm-ridden sky over the Sound of Sleat in which I find the living image of past dreams, dreams which had emerged from memory and the swirl of paint. Here I can see the drama of nature charged and compressed. Lands form, seas disappear, worlds fragment, colors merge or give birth to burning shapes, mountain snows show emerald green. Or, for a moment, life stops still when the gales pause and the sky clears after long days of careening sound and horizontal rain or snow.

The sky: Father, Mother, Mistress, and the lonely mystery of endless love. Each moment of light or night is as complex as all of life.

From the claustrophobic terror of my studio I enter the unframed sky. There I find every passion, soaring to Death, as certain and as fleeting as the intimacy of a night mist, passion which melts aesthetic pleasure and seduces the intellect across the horizon or past the shadow on the sea. The sky is an enlargement of man, suggesting mind beyond that which one feels and understands. The artist lives in loneliness, searching for what he can only fail to find, as he looks to the sky or to his work, to the canvas, to his scratchings, to his mark.

I fall in motionless silence across a high sky. I watch the light spread through the shadowed snow-cloud and the sea, and I recognize what I have always known and have come here to find: Not the Highlands, but a nameless place—unless North is a name. It is truly North. The sun and shadow and infinite sea, all of it the sky, vast and intimate, eternal creation and destruction, one, a simplicity impossible to understand.

Jon Schueler



Photograph by Magda Salvesen, 1974

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

- 1916 Born September 12, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- 1934–40 Studied at University of Wisconsin, M.A. English literature.
- 1941–44 In U.S. Air Force, B-17 Navigator in England.
- 1945 Started painting in Los Angeles.
- 1947–51 Studied at California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco, with Clyfford Still, Richard Diebenkorn and others.
- 1951–70 In New York with periods abroad, including year at Mallaig, Scotland, 1957–58. One-man exhibitions in New York at Stable Gallery (1954, 1961, 1963), Leo Castelli Gallery (1957, 1959), Hirschl and Adler Galleries (1960) and elsewhere.
- 1970–75 Lives in Mallaig, Scotland. One-man exhibitions at Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh (1971), Edinburgh College of Art (1973) and elsewhere. Now represented in U.S.A. by Ben Heller.

#### CATALOGUE

The listing is chronological. Measurements are in inches, height preceding width. Oils are on canvas, watercolors on paper. Numbers in parentheses are from the artist's own index of his work. All works are lent by the artist, courtesy of Ben Heller.

#### OILS:

- Light IV* (236), 1972, 72 x 74  
*Mood with Magda, Light* (314), 1972, 76 x 69  
*Light on Skye R* (360), 1973, 70 x 63  
*Blue Sky Study, II* (392), 1974, 48 x 42  
*Sleat Remembered: Light, I* (393), 1974, 76 x 69  
*Sleat Remembered: Light, II* (394), 1974, 75 x 80  
*Grey Sky and the Sea, III* (399), 1974, 14 x 16  
*Summer Sea Remembered, II* (402), 1974, 32 x 36  
*Sea: Winter Grey* (405), 1974, 24 x 18  
*Sun and Sleat, III* (412), 1974, 10 x 12  
*Snow Cloud: Sun and Sleat, III* (415), 1974, 9 x 11  
*Storm at Sea* (419), 1974, 8 x 10  
*Ode to Bunty: A Winter Dream* (429), 1974, 69 x 76  
*Jane Series, IV* (431), 1974, 80 x 75  
*Sleat Light and Shadow, II* (451), 1974, 16 x 20  
*Counterlight* (453), 1974, 14 x 12  
*Mood with Magda: Blues in Grey, III* (454), 1974, 14 x 12

#### WATERCOLORS:

- Untitled (165), 1974, 10¼ x 14  
 Untitled (167), 1974, 8¾ x 11¼  
 Untitled (205), 1974, 5 x 6  
 Untitled (209), 1974, 8 x 10  
 Untitled (212), 1974, 10¾ x 14¾  
 Untitled (213), 1974, 10½ x 14

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Cover: *Ode to Bunty: A Winter Dream*, 1974  
 Photograph by Geoffrey Clements